



Ministry of
Agriculture

Farm & Food Report

Communications Branch, Walter Scott Building
3085 Albert Street, Regina, Canada, S4S 0B1

Saskatchewan

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BIOFUELS FIRM CHOOSES SASKATCHEWAN FOR INAUGURAL CONFERENCE

The Canadian arm of an international biofuels firm believes Saskatchewan is the natural location for a new national conference focusing on ethanol and biodiesel.

BBI Biofuels is organizing "CREW 2008," the Canadian Renewable Energy Workshop and Tradeshow, which will take place March 16 to 18 at IPSCO Place in Regina.

"We went through a selection process for location," said Lionel Grant, the Canadian Conference Co-ordinator for BBI. "Saskatchewan was our main interest, because of the amount of feedstock available for renewable fuels, and the number of plants in planning or under development. It's got the highest activity in all of Canada."

He added, "We were also looking for a strong agricultural presence, as well as industry suppliers and proponents. There are a lot of farmer-based initiatives that are looking to renewable fuels to be the future."

BBI Biofuels has offices in the United States, Canada and Australia. The company has three main thrusts. One is project development services related to the establishment of biofuel production sites, such as feasibility studies. A second focus is the production and distribution of various industry publications through its media division. A third interest is conference organization, which is what ultimately led to the upcoming workshop in Regina.

Grant says BBI works on numerous conferences throughout the United States, either on its own or on behalf of other organizations. "We have probably the largest renewable fuel event in the world, and that is our Fuel Ethanol Workshop. That's going to occur in Nashville in June of this year," he said.

BBI has also worked with the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association for the last four years in helping to organize and plan its Canadian Renewable Fuels Summit, on which the CREW 2008 event will build.

"We are positioning CREW 2008 to be a technology- and education-based event in order to complement the Canadian Renewable Fuels Association's summit, which is directed more towards policy and marketing," Grant said. "We are planning on holding it on a yearly basis, so this is what we hope will become the 'first annual.'"

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The workshop will cover a wide cross-section of issues that are important to the biofuels industry, geared towards different levels of involvement. Grant says biofuel producers will have an obvious interest, but so too will the general farm community, financial institutions, equipment suppliers, governments, community leaders and researchers.

"We will have something there for everyone," he stated. "If people are considering producing, we will have information to help them make wise decisions going through the process of opening a new facility. If they are current producers, we intend the workshop to provide them with new insights that will make their production better."

Grant highlights sessions on plant maintenance, operational challenges and changes in the production standards as topics that will appeal to those currently engaged in the industry. For prospective producers, he says presentations on how to raise cash at the community level, what banks want to know, controlling commodity costs and raw materials, and the ins and outs of building a plant will especially resonate.

There will also be ethanol-specific and biodiesel-specific streams going on to help further refine the information delivered, focusing on topics such as alternatives to distillers grains, research perspectives, emerging feedstocks and new technologies.

Speakers for the conference will come from both the United States and Canada, with a strong contingent from Saskatchewan. "As much as possible, we really wanted to focus on the industry in North America," Grant stated.

In addition to the main workshop, there will also be pre-conference introductory courses, entitled Ethanol 101 and Biodiesel 101, "for people who aren't all that familiar with the industry, but would like to know more," Grant said.

The registration fee for the CREW 2008 workshop is \$495 per person, while the pre-conference courses cost \$150 each.

More information on the program agenda, registration and trade show is available online at the event's website, www.crew2008.com.

"We're really excited to be hosting this in Saskatchewan," Grant said. "We look forward to listening to the attendees' questions, and building a really strong forum for the industry in Canada that will continue for years to come."

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2008 WHEAT MIDGE FORECAST RAISES RED FLAG

The 2008 forecast for wheat midge is out – and it raises a red flag for producers in several areas of the province.

“Compared to last year, the area of infestation seems to have enlarged in the province. There are more areas that are showing potential problems with wheat midge for 2008 than perhaps ever before,” said Dale Risula, an Integrated Cropping Management Systems Specialist with the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture.

“Furthermore, looking at the areas of the province where wheat midge have been a problem for the past number of years, it appears as though they may be worse in 2008 than they have been for some time now.”

A colour-coded map outlining the forecast is posted on the ministry’s website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca under the “Production” link.

A large number of RMs, most notably a wide belt from Yorkton to Prince Albert, show a severe risk of infestation this year, with numbers that could rise above 1,800 midge per square metre. Areas of potential infestation also extend into the southwest, where wheat midge historically have been less of a concern than in other regions of the province.

According to Risula, two main factors have likely given rise to the growing problem posed by the pest. The first is environmental conditions. Wheat midge favour wetter conditions rather than drier, and areas at the greatest potential risk of midge are those that have experienced abundant moisture in recent years.

The second factor is crop selection. Wheat is, by far, the midge’s preferred host crop. The resurgence in wheat prices, driven by growing market opportunities such as in the ethanol industry, has resulted in producers returning to the crop in greater numbers.

“We’ve seen an increase in seeded acres where farmers are growing wheat again, and of course, this provides a suitable host for wheat midge to flourish because that’s what they prefer,” Risula noted. “So when you’ve got a suitable host crop and suitable environmental conditions, the populations tend to grow.”

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Infestations of the pest can reduce crop yields and lower the grade of harvested grain. Given the populations anticipated for the coming growing season, the potential for economic damage is considerable.

The harm to crops is caused by the wheat midge larvae, which feed on the developing kernel after hatching. Wheat is vulnerable from the moment the head of the plant is first visible as the boot splits, until flowering is complete. The timing can vary by variety of wheat and weather conditions, but, on average, Risula estimates this period to be up to about 14 days.

That means producers generally have a very short window of opportunity in which to identify the problem and apply pesticide in order for control methods to be effective.

"I think producers will need to be very vigilant in the coming year, because my guess is that there will be a lot of interest in seeding wheat in light of the opportunities that are there with either durum or hard red spring wheat, or the CPS varieties for ethanol," Risula said. "So they will really need to monitor those fields and monitor them regularly once the midge emerge and if the crop is in a susceptible stage. This will not be a year in which anyone can afford to turn a blind eye to this."

The wheat midge forecast is jointly developed by the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture, the Saskatchewan Crop Insurance Corporation and Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada. It is based on the cocoon count taken from core soil samples gathered at locations throughout the province. The forecast is based on viable, unparasitized cocoons.

While actual wheat midge numbers could differ from the forecast if the growing or weather conditions depart from the norm, Risula says the actual severity of crop damage has correlated very closely with the pre-season prediction for each of the past three years.

More information and advice on wheat midge projections, detection and control methods can be found on the Saskatchewan Agriculture website or by calling the Agriculture Knowledge Centre at 1-866-457-2377.

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STUDY CONFIRMS EFFICIENCY OF FERTILIZING WITH MANURE

Swine and cattle manure remain effective sources of fertilization, according to a two-year study conducted by University of Saskatchewan researchers with funding from the Saskatchewan Ministry of Agriculture's Agriculture Development Fund (ADF).

Jeff Schoenau, Saskatchewan Agriculture's Research Chair in Nutrient Management and a professor at the university's Department of Soil Science, was the principal investigator for this study.

"We've been following the effect of repeated application of manure on soils and crops at sites across Saskatchewan for upwards of 10 years now. In this project, we took a look at what happens when manure is added at agronomic and excessive rates, in terms of how that affects soil nutrient loading and crop growth," Schoenau said.

"The other thing we did is to see if there were some strategies that would be useful in increasing the crop recovery of the applied manure nutrient."

The study was conducted with swine manure at three sites and cattle manure at a fourth site. It was assisted by the Prairie Agriculture Machinery Institute (PAMI), which used injection technology to provide the manure applications in all cases. There were some variations in the approaches to the tests.

"We have different rates of application, applied annually and every second year, liquid manure at all of the sites and cattle manure at one of the sites," said Schoenau. "We looked at adding a nitrification inhibitor, and also supplemental commercial fertilizer."

The study recognizes the potential new cost benefits of applying manure as a primary fertilization source.

"The nutrients that are contained in manure are very valuable, and if you look at what's happening to the price of commercial fertilizer, they become even more valuable," Schoenau stated.

"We are looking toward management practices that can help improve the benefits of manure ingredients in crop production systems, while maintaining or improving environmental quality."

The researchers were trying to determine the optimum rate, sequence, and method of application for manure that would maximize crop recovery and minimize nutrient loading issues. The results were very consistent in the case of swine manure.

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"We got very good crop response out of the nitrogen and other nutrients contained in the swine manure at rates around 80 to 100 pounds of nitrogen per acre per year," Schoenau said. "That equates to an application rate of about 3,000 to 4,000 gallons per acre."

The site using cattle manure required a bit more management.

"Cattle manure is quite high in phosphorous relative to nitrogen," he noted. "We did see issues with phosphorus loading that we could help alleviate to a certain extent by adding some commercial fertilizer nitrogen."

According to the study results, when it comes to strategies to maximize the recovery of crop manure nutrients, the most important aspects are the rate of application, the method of application and incorporation (injection gives a better recovery of the nitrogen than broadcast), and the sequence of application (higher rates every second year also seemed to work quite well).

"You need to be monitoring not just one individual nutrient; it's important to be monitoring all nutrients for balance," said Schoenau. "If something is missing, you can supplement with commercial fertilizer."

Schoenau said the work in this area will continue.

"We are still monitoring two of the sites for another three years. We will be paying a bit more attention to aspects of accumulation of nutrients like phosphorus in those soils, what kind of chemical forms it is accumulating in, and how that might relate to loss potential," he noted.

A copy of the ADF project *Maximizing Long-Term Benefits from Swine Manure Nutrients Applied to Saskatchewan Soils*, #20040375, is available on the Saskatchewan Agriculture website at www.agriculture.gov.sk.ca.

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PLANT OILS WORKSHOP TO SHED LIGHT ON VALUE-ADDED POTENTIAL

A popular conference aimed at taking advantage of opportunities in the rapidly expanding plant oils sector is just around the corner.

The fourth "Plant Bio-Industrial Oils Workshop" will take place February 27 and 28 in Saskatoon.

The annual event has emerged as an important discussion forum for key players from the business, academic and government sectors working on the development and industrial application of oilseeds.

Ron Kehrig, a vice president with Ag-West Bio Inc., says the seminar is serving an increasingly important purpose, given the growth the sector is experiencing. "There's a lot of opportunity for plant-based oils related to biofuels and other bio-products, but there are also a lot of issues that the industry has to deal with, too," he stated.

"We're taking a heads-up approach to identifying and discussing some of these issues. That's really what we're trying to foster as the industry continues to evolve. It's all about moving forward and building economic activity around the opportunity that's before us."

This year's program features a broad-based agenda, covering topics such as novel plant oil profiles, technologies for plant breeding and oil extraction, current industrial uses and potential applications, oilseed initiatives from across the country and around the world, and the present regulatory environment.

Kehrig feels the wide-ranging discussion is a real strength of the conference. "We've been creating a knowledge-based economy," he noted. "So the more knowledge we have, the better able we are to make decisions and advance the industry."

Approximately 16 speakers will address the two-day seminar, sharing observations from the perspectives of producers, breeders and business. The workshop regularly attracts delegates from across Canada and beyond, but the lineup of presenters this year will also have an international flair. Speakers from Malaysia, Germany and the United States will be joining local experts in addressing various important aspects of the industry.

"This workshop is a way to bridge commercial interests, academic interests and regulatory interests," Kehrig said. "We provide it as a forum for good discussion, making contacts and gaining a better understanding of what's coming down the pipe. In this way, we can identify some of the opportunities

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and see just what the lay of the land looks like.”

Kehrig says the discussion is very relevant to the Saskatchewan agricultural scene, since plant-based oils are found in crops such as canola, flax and mustard that are commonly grown in the province, as well as emerging crops such as camelina and Brassica carinata that may have a bright future here.

“As an organization, Ag-West Bio is essentially focused on economic development through the commercialization of technologies related to the bio-based economy,” he stated. “We know that the plant oils industry offers not only tremendous economic benefit, but also environmental benefit and social benefit through things like rural development.”

More details and registration information for the Plant Bio-Oils Industrial Workshop can be obtained on the Ag-West Bio Inc. website at www.agwest.sk.ca or by calling the group’s main office at (306) 975-1939.

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COLOSTRUM VITAL FOR NEWBORN CALVES

Producing strong, healthy calves can be the difference between a profit and a loss for any cattle operation. As such, the importance of colostrum in the early hours of a calf's life cannot be overstated.

Newborn calves have virtually no immunity of their own. Antibodies are transferred to them from their mothers in the form of colostrum, or first milk. These antibodies protect the calf from disease for the first two months until it begins to make its own antibodies.

So significant is the issue that the Farm Animal Council of Saskatchewan (FACS) devoted one of its many "Cattle FACS" fact sheets to the subject in order to help producers gain more knowledge in this area.

The information provided through the fact sheets is developed by committees of cattle care experts with specific knowledge in each of the topic areas covered. They are co-ordinated, produced and made available to producers through the FACS organization.

Dr. Colin Palmer, an associate professor with the Western College of Veterinary Medicine at the University of Saskatchewan, worked on the fact sheet related to colostrum.

"The significant absorption of antibodies only occurs in the first 12 hours of life, so it's essential that calves receive colostrum within that period of time to develop an immunity to infectious agents they might meet in the first two months of life," Palmer stated. "After that, most antibodies are digested, although some can act locally in the gut."

While 12 hours is the maximum time producers should allow, Palmer says calves should ideally nurse within the first six hours after birth for the greatest absorption of antibodies. One to two litres of colostrum should be ingested.

A bigger problem may exist when the mothering cow dies or is left weakened following calving, or neglects the calf after birth. Fortunately, calves do not require colostrum from their own mothers, and newborns can be tube-fed with fresh colostrum collected from another cow, or stored colostrum frozen and then thawed in warm water when required.

"Be prepared for mothering and nursing challenges by taking advantage of opportunities to collect colostrum from cows that lost calves or have an abundance of first milk," Palmer said.

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During the hectic calving season, fresh colostrum can be kept at room temperature for eight to 10 hours. It can last seven to 10 days in a refrigerator, and extra amounts can be frozen in one- to two-litre lots for easy storage and thawing.

Powdered colostrum is also commercially available, and can be prepared on an as-needed basis.

According to Palmer, almost all calves that become sick with diarrhoea, navel ill, septicemia (blood poisoning) or pneumonia experience a failure of passive transfer of colostral immunoglobulins from a cow's first milk.

He suggests that producers need to take note of calves that have not nursed properly within the first two or three hours after birth, and make a judgment call on whether action should be taken.

"In cold weather, calves will chill and may not nurse in time. In this case, tubing may be appropriate, because colostrum also provides readily available energy," he noted. "On a warm day, you may want to give the cow and calf more time, but keep a close eye on the situation."

When it comes to colostrum, producers should err on the side of caution and assume that an apparently abandoned calf has not suckled and should be fed.

The Cattle FACS fact sheet on colostrum, as well as many others on a variety of important topics related to cattle care, can be obtained on the organization's website at www.facs.sk.ca or by calling (306) 249-3227.

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